

P 101457Z MAY 95  
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9561  
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO  
AMEMBASSY MBABANE  
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA  
AMEMBASSY GABORONE  
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG  
AMCONSUL DURBAN  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMEMBASSY MASERU  
AMEMBASSY HARARE  
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK  
AMEMBASSY WINDHOEK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRETORIA 005893

CAPE TOWN ALSO FOR EXECUTIVE OFFICE AND POL  
LONDON FOR YOUNG, PARIS FOR MORAN/ROBL

E.O. 12356: DECL: 5/10/2025  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KPRP](#) [SF](#)  
SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA: THABO MBEKI, THE MAN WHO WOULD BE  
PRESIDENT

11. (CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT).

-----  
SUMMARY  
-----

12. AFTER A YEAR IN OFFICE DEPUTY PRESIDENT THABO MBEKI'S  
IMAGE APPEARS A BIT TARNISHED, THE RESULT OF HIS  
QUESTIONABLE HANDLING OF THE FIRING OF WINNIE MANDELA,  
HIS HASTE TO CAST DOUBT ON ALLAN BOESAK'S CULPABILITY ON  
CORRUPTION CHARGES, HIS WAFFLING ON THE QUESTION OF  
INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION AND HIS ATTACKS ON THE MEDIA.  
THOUGH THE MAN WHO WOULD BE PRESIDENT REMAINS UNTOUCHED  
BY PERSONAL SCANDAL AND IS UNCHALLENGED IN HIS SENIOR  
PARTY AND GOVERNMENT POSITIONS, HIS PRINCIPAL WEAKNESS  
SEEMS TO BE THAT HE CANNOT SEE THAT ASSOCIATION WITH  
CERTAIN PEOPLE CAN BE DAMAGING TO HIM. WHILE NELSON  
MANDELA WOULD PROBABLY LIKE TO SEE MBEKI SUCCEED HIM AS  
PRESIDENT OF THE ANC AND SOUTH AFRICA, THE GIFT IS NOT  
ENTIRELY HIS TO GIVE. MBEKI STILL HAS THE HURDLE OF THE  
ANC'S 1997 NATIONAL CONFERENCE TO OVERCOME. A LOT CAN  
HAPPEN BETWEEN NOW AND THEN, AND WE HEAR REPORTS THAT  
FORCES ALREADY ARE QUIETLY WORKING TO UNDERMINE HIM.  
HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE THE KINGMAKERS OF 1999 COULD BE THE  
SEVEN ANC PROVINCIAL PREMIERS. END SUMMARY.

-----  
THE RUNNER STUMBLES  
-----

13. MBEKI HAS GONE THROUGH A BAD PATCH OF PUBLICITY OF  
LATE. FIRST, INSTRUCTED BY THE PRESIDENT TO FIRE ONE OF  
HIS KEY ALLIES IN THE ANC, WINNIE MANDELA, FROM THE  
CABINET HE TRIED TO TALK HER INTO APOLOGIZING. MRS.  
MANDELA DID NOT, WRITING INSTEAD A BITTER LETTER THAT  
AMOUNTED TO AN AD HOMINEM ATTACK ON HER ESTRANGED  
HUSBAND. FINALLY MANDELA FIRED HER HIMSELF, SKIPPING A  
FEW CONSTITUTIONALLY STIPULATED STEPS, APPARENTLY HAVING  
BEEN POORLY ADVISED. MRS. MANDELA THREATENED TO SUE AND  
WHEN IT BECAME APPARENT SHE HAD SOLID LEGAL GROUNDS, SHE  
WAS REINSTATED, ONLY TO BE FIRED AGAIN. IT WAS AN  
EMBARRASSING EPISODE DURING WHICH MBEKI (NOT ENTIRELY  
COINCIDENTALLY) MANAGED TO FIND HIMSELF OUT OF THE  
COUNTRY. THE WHITE PRESS CRITICIZED MBEKI AS INDECISIVE.

14. NEXT, MBEKI RUSHED TO CLAIM A REPORT PREPARED BY HIS  
LEGAL ADVISOR, MOJANKU GUMBI, EXONERATED DISGRACED ANC  
WESTERN CAPE LEADER ALLAN BOESAK OF CULPABILITY IN  
CORRUPTION CHARGES. A SENIOR ANC OFFICIAL TOLD US THAT  
BOESAK, WITH TEARS STREAMING DOWN HIS FACE, VISITED  
PRESIDENT MANDELA AT ANC HEADQUARTERS JUST PRIOR TO THE

RELEASE OF THE REPORT'S FINDINGS TO PROCLAIM HIS INNOCENCE. BASED ON MBEKI'S STATEMENT AND BOESAK'S DRAMATIC APPEAL, MANDELA PUBLICLY VOICED HIS CONFIDENCE IN BOESAK, SAYING THE LATTER SHOULD RECEIVE ANOTHER AMBASSADORSHIP. BOESAK CROWED ABOUT HIS "REHABILITATION" AND DECLARED HE WAS READY TO SERVE HIS COUNTRY'S GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, SINCE THE INVESTIGATION BY THE OFFICE OF SERIOUS ECONOMIC OFFENSES HAD NOT BEEN CONCLUDED, THE PRESIDENT AND DEPUTY PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS SMACKED OF A WHITEWASH, WHICH THE PRESS HERE CRITICIZED MERCILESSLY. GUMBI SUBSEQUENTLY CLARIFIED THAT THE REPORT ONLY STATED THAT SHE HAD SEEN NO EVIDENCE IMPLICATING BOESAK OF POCKETING FOREIGN DONOR FUNDS. MANDELA BACKPEDALLED ON THE PROMISED APPOINTMENT, AND MBEKI ALLEGEDLY TOLD BOESAK TO SHUN THE SPOTLIGHT WHILE HE LOOKED FOR A JOB FOR HIM, POSSIBLY AT ANC HEADQUARTERS.

15. ON MAY 5, A WELL-CONNECTED ANC LAWYER TOLD US GUMBI'S SHORT REPORT WAS MEANT ONLY AS AN UPDATE FOR INTERNAL USE, NOT A FINAL, PUBLIC REPORT. HE STRONGLY CRITICIZED MBEKI FOR RELEASING THE REPORT, WHILE EXPRESSING CONFIDENCE IN GUMBI.

16. MANDELA HAS ALSO GIVEN MBEKI THE LEAD IN LAYING OUT THE ANC'S EXPLANATIONS FOR FAILING TO ACT ON THE APRIL 1994 AGREEMENT WITH INKATHA AND THE NP TO SEEK INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION OF CERTAIN OUTSTANDING CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES. MBEKI WAS ALSO CHARGED WITH NEGOTIATING THE ISSUE WITH THE IFP AND NP. WHILE PRIVATELY REASSURING TO INKATHA LEADER MANGOSUTHU BUTHELEZI, IN HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON THE ISSUE MBEKI HAS TAKEN A PARTICULARLY HARD LINE. THE ANC HAS IN CONSEQUENCE TAKEN A DRUBBING FROM ASSORTED PARTY SPOKESPERSONS, JOURNALISTS, AND OTHER OBSERVERS.

17. FINALLY, ACCORDING TO MEDIA REPORTS, MBEKI IN RECENT WEEKS HAS BEEN WHIPPING UP ANTI-PRESS SENTIMENT BOTH IN THE ANC'S PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS AND THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (NEC). HE BLAMED THE MEDIA FOR HIS RECENT TROUBLES, POINTED OUT THAT THE PRESS WAS DICTATING ANC DECISIONS, AND CULTIVATED A FEAR AMONG ANC ACTIVISTS THAT A HOSTILE PRESS WILL KEEP ANTI-ANC NEWS IN THE HEADLINES AS MOMENTUM BUILDS UP FOR THE NOVEMBER LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS. ONE INFLUENTIAL NEWSPAPER REPORTED THAT MBEKI'S SUSPICION OF THE MEDIA LED HIM TO CALL FOR RADIO AND TELEVISION TIME SLOTS FOR GOVERNMENT BROADCASTS. SOME OBSERVERS HERE INTERPRET MBEKI'S INTOLERANCE OF CRITICISM AS A RESIDUAL CHARACTERISTIC OF HIS DAYS IN EXILE, WHEN THE LIBERATION MOVEMENT BROOKED NO DISSENT.

-----  
WHEELER DEALER  
-----

18. WHILE MBEKI MAY HAVE BEEN SCORED BY THE PRESS, HIS POSITION WITHIN THE ANC AND GOVERNMENT IS SECURE. SELF-ASSURED, ARTICULATE AND CHARISMATIC, HE REMAINS ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S SHREWDEST POLITICIANS. HE HAS PLACED HIS ALLIES IN KEY GOVERNMENT PORTFOLIOS, AND CONTINUES TO BUILD UP AND CALL IN FAVORS. NOT STRAITJACKETED BY IDEOLOGY, MBEKI IS IN THE SAME PRAGMATIC CAMP AS CYRIL RAMAPHOSA. IF HE HAS A WEAKNESS IT IS AN INABILITY TO FORESEE THE HARM THAT ASSOCIATION WITH CERTAIN PEOPLE CAN CAUSE.

19. SINCE HIS REELECTION AS ANC SECRETARY GENERAL AND THE DEATH OF KEY SUPPORTER JOE SLOVO, CYRIL RAMAPHOSA'S RIVALRY WITH MBEKI HAS SUBSIDED. MBEKI LIEUTENANTS APPEAR CONCERNED THAT DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL CHERYL CAROLUS IS A BECOMING A MAGNET FOR MBEKI'S ADVERSARIES. ANC INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR YUSUF SALOOJEE TOLD US THAT THE EMPLOYEES IN HIS OFFICE WERE BYPASSED FOR A RAISE GRANTED TO ALL ANC HEADQUARTERS EMPLOYEES IN 1994. INFORMED OF THE DISPARITY, PRESIDENT MANDELA INSTRUCTED CAROLUS, WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE ANC'S DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS, BEFORE THE NATIONAL WORKING COMMITTEE IN APRIL 1995 TO RECTIFY THE SITUATION IMMEDIATELY. SALOOJEE

HIMSELF COLLECTED 68,000 RANDS (APPROXIMATELY USD 18,900) IN BACK PAY. SALOOJEE ALSO TOLD US THAT CAROLUS, WHO IS CLOSE TO KEY MBEKI RIVAL MAC MAHARAJ, FAILS TO INFORM HIS DEPARTMENT, WHICH ACTS AS MBEKI'S EYES AND EARS AT HEADQUARTERS, OF IMPORTANT MEETINGS.

¶10. IN HIS GOVERNMENT OFFICES, ONE IS GREETED BY THE SIGHT OF MINISTERS AND PARTY OFFICIALS WAITING FOR MBEKI TO RECEIVE THEM AND TO TAKE ACTION ON A HOST OF PERSONAL AND POLITICAL MATTERS. DUE TO POOR STAFFING AND HIS PUNISHING TRAVEL SCHEDULE, MUCH BUSINESS FALLS THROUGH THE CRACKS. MBEKI HAS BEEN CRITICIZED FOR MISSING APPOINTMENTS, AND DOCUMENTS LIE IN HIS IN-BASKET FOR WEEKS. HE IS CONSTITUTIONALLY UNABLE TO DELEGATE DECISION MAKING AUTHORITY, AND EXHAUSTS HIMSELF BY BECOMING EXCESSIVELY INVOLVED IN THE MOST MINUTE DETAILS ON A RANGE OF ISSUES.

¶11. AFTER A YEAR IN HIGH GOVERNMENT OFFICE MBEKI REMAINS PERSONALLY UNTAINTED BY SCANDAL. MBEKI HAS ALWAYS LIVED COMFORTABLY, THANKS LARGELY TO HIS WIFE'S INCOME AS A UNITED NATIONS EMPLOYEE AND BANK OFFICIAL, BUT NEVER SUMPTUOUSLY. A RESPECTED FEMALE JOURNALIST AND LONGSTANDING EMBASSY CONTACT CONFIDED TO US THAT SHE AVOIDS ONE-ON-ONE SESSIONS WITH MBEKI BECAUSE HE HAS MADE SEXUAL ADVANCES TOWARD HER. HOWEVER, SUCH STORIES ARE RELATIVELY RARE, AND MBEKI HAS NOT GAINED THE REPUTATION OF A "WOMANIZER".

-----  
MANDELA'S SUCCESSOR?  
-----

¶12. MBEKI'S MOST IMPORTANT ASSET IS THE TRUST AND AFFECTION OF NELSON MANDELA. MANDELA HAS MADE HIM THE MR. FIX-IT OF THE GOVERNMENT AND HANDED HIM INCREASING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DAY-TO-DAY ADMINISTRATION OF THE GOVERNMENT. IF MANDELA COULD, HE WOULD INSTALL HIS HAND-PICKED CHOICE FOR SUCCESSOR IN THE PRESIDENCY OF BOTH PARTY AND COUNTRY IN 1997 AND 1999, RESPECTIVELY. HOWEVER, THE GIFT IS NOT ENTIRELY MANDELA'S TO GIVE.

¶13. MBEKI STILL HAS THE 1997 ANC NATIONAL CONFERENCE TO SURVIVE BEFORE HE CAN CLAIM THE MANTLE OF LEADERSHIP. AT THIS WRITING IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT HOW POLITICAL FORCES WITHIN THE PARTY WILL BE RANGED AT THAT TIME. WE FIND IT PLAUSIBLE THAT ANC PROVINCIAL PREMIERS COULD BEGIN BUILDING POWER BASES AND MACHINES IN THEIR PROVINCES. ASSUMING THAT NONE OF THESE SATRAPS-IN-THE-MAKING CHOOSES OPENLY TO CHALLENGE MBEKI FOR THE ANC LEADERSHIP, THEY COULD VERY WELL BECOME KINGMAKERS, WHOM MBEKI WILL HAVE TO COURT ASSIDUOUSLY. INDEED, MBEKI SPENDS A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF TIME VISITING THE PROVINCES AND HANDLING ANC PROBLEMS THERE IN RECOGNITION OF THIS FACT.

-----  
COMMENT  
-----

¶14. MBEKI'S PERFORMANCE AFTER A YEAR IN OFFICE HAS SPARKED SOME REVISIONIST THINKING ABOUT THE MAN. WHILE STILL RESPECTED FOR HIS FORMIDABLE INTELLECT AND POLITICAL INFIGHTING SKILLS, WE GET THE SENSE THAT SOME PEOPLE HERE ARE BEGINNING TO QUESTION MORE OPENLY WHAT MBEKI STANDS FOR. MANDELA IS LETTING MUCH OF THE BUCK STOP AT HIS DEPUTY'S DESK, AND PROBLEMS AT THAT LEVEL HAVE PROVEN IMPERVIOUS EITHER TO HIS DISARMING CHARM OR THE TACTICS HE HAS SO OFTEN USED TO DEMOLISH RIVALS. HIS OFFICE IS WOEFULLY STAFFED AND NOT ORGANIZED FOR HANDLING THIS TYPE OF RESPONSIBILITY (MANDELA'S IS NOT BETTER), WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR SOME OF THE MISSTEPS OF RECENT MONTHS. SO FAR HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO RIDE THE TIGER, BUT IN THE RUNNING FOR THE NEXT PRESIDENCY MBEKI WILL BE, IN THE WORDS OF A RESPECTED JOURNALIST HERE, A FASCINATING CHARACTER TO WATCH. END COMMENT.

LYMAN